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## NOTES AND COMMENTS.

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### I.

#### ASSUMPTION AND PRETENSION.

MAN's foremost object is, apparently, to make himself seem something else than he actually is. Throughout the world, the rill wants to be a river, and the goose-pond a sea. Adaptation to existing circumstances is wilfully subjected to the conjuring of that which is beyond grasp. No station, no position, seems congenial or satisfactory, and there is a universal strife and rivalry in reaching out after the useless and the unattainable. The laborer wants to be tradesman, the tradesman wants to be knight, the knight wants to be king, and the king mourns and laments because there are no grades above him.

Birth, of course, is a matter of accident, and many a man fit to wear a crown is born in some wood-chopper's hut, just as many a hand which sways a sceptre could drive an awl better. Yet, in the main, the most of us come into life in the station to which we are best suited ; and, if chance orders it otherwise, the man who is worthy of a higher place can lift himself into it.

Every man has a right to make himself something better than he is, but no man has a right to claim honor and credit which are not due him. The time which a man wastes in trying to force the world to accept him for something which he is not, would, if properly used and economized, enable him to make himself something higher and better than that which he is trying to seem. But there is, instead, too often, a misuse of energy and a misapplication of endeavor. Teaching and training are somewhat at fault in this, because many parents have an unwholesome readiness toward assuring their children that there is no other sphere or department in life which is quite so lamentable as the one into which they are born. And so discontent is germinated and nurtured until it becomes the rankest weed in the garden of life.

With discontent comes tendencies toward imitation. But no man can be anything else than that which he is. The ox can never be a horse, nor the hawk an eagle—however much these humble creatures may strive to perform the vocations of those above them. Imitation, at best, is but a silly thing, and assumption is the degradation next to it ; and he who tries to seem a prince, when he is a boor, is about the only person in the world who does not see through the sham.

The ignorant get the most satisfaction out of pretense, because the ignorant man alone can make a thorough fool of himself, unconsciously. The wiser the man, the more fully he knows that deceit will not always stand him in stead ; and the *savant* who is worthy of the name had rather seem nine-tenths less, rather than one-tenth more, than he is. Very few, however, are great enough wholly to avoid assumption in some particular and in some degree.

No man who has never been a peasant can appreciate the feelings of peasants ; and no man who has never been king can understand a king's emotions, except

superficially and imperfectly. A vine-dresser and a chemist can scarcely regard grape-juice from the same point of view. One cannot become a wit by the appropriation of a jester's cap and bells. To know the duties of a prelate, one must be a prelate. Hypothetical knowledge and precept count for but little; example is all that illuminates and disentangles. Assuming to feel that which one has never felt, and to know that which one has never known, is the most dangerous and reckless thing in the world; and yet pretense is so common, so nearly general, that to criticise one's neighbor is to invite criticism upon one's self. The impossibility of doing a mechanic's work without first learning the mechanic's trade is a foregone conclusion; and yet a boor dons a gentleman's habiliments, and tries, by the sheer force of insistence, to prove that he has the right to style himself gentleman.

Few, if any, ever make the most of their possibilities and opportunities. Chance throws something in a man's very hands, but instead of closing them over it, and holding fast to that which the fates have sent, he lets it go, and contents himself with pretense rather than possession. Professional men, who in this respect have the advantage over individuals in private life, receive praise and adulation for acquirements of which they are wholly innocent. But the worst of the weakness is not in this direction; men do not assume so much concerning their own sphere as they do concerning some other department of life which is considered higher and more honorable.

This, of course, is truest of babblers and the purely mediocre. A person of rare attainments seldom cares what estimate the world places on him. It may, as it pleases, call him great, or slight; he is wholly content in either case. Conscious of his power and capacity, the verdict of the world falls on him lightly. This is a kind of self-consciousness which is commendable. It is not vanity, for it has no outward expression—except in the case of some artist, and then only through legitimate channels. Not to know one's self is like walking with the prisoner's clog at one's ankle; there is a drag on everything, freedom in nothing. The greatest poets, painters, and players know their exact brain-capacity, and use it. Victor Hugo, and Ivan Turgenieff were masters of themselves before they were masters of their art. They are masters of life and of reason. There is philosophy, religion, poetry, in every line they write. All is genuine, all is immortal which they propound, and both will yet be accepted as great leaders and great teachers. There is no pretense in them, because there is nothing for them to pretend, even if their's had been, as they were not, base natures. To them, the eternal and the internal is all that life holds. The external is nothing. This makes substance of all, shadow of nothing. In such living, one speaks to the world and of the world—not with the world; like a sphinx, propounding truths which no man can answer. It is the voice of a prophet, speaking to the hearing, and yet the speechless.

GEORGE SAND.

## II.

### SCIENTIFIC TAXATION.

THE great injustice, not to say utter rottenness, of the whole system of American taxation, is leading, just now, to much discussion, and to a demand for reform. The discussion is very superficial. But no other question before the people, or that can be put before them, is of such immediate practical importance. Stupid and inequitable taxation, direct and indirect, may be charged with most of the ills, and most of the crimes that curse modern civilization. By taking "from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned," to use the words of Jefferson, such taxation has defeated what he declared necessary to make Americans "a happy and prosperous people." Our country is full of tax thimblerriggers on the one hand,